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National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
Diseases and Conditions Index

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Asthma

Living With Asthma

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If you have asthma, it is important to learn how to take care of yourself. Work with your doctor on a daily asthma self-management plan that you are both happy with.

- Tell your doctor about all other medications you are taking, in case one of them affects your asthma.
- Follow your asthma self-management plan and have regular checkups.
- Learn to use your medication correctly. Ask your doctor to teach you how to use your inhaler. This is very important. If you do not use your inhalers correctly, less medication will get into your airways.
- If you are having problems taking your asthma medicine, let your doctor know right away.

You need to know what things bring on your asthma symptoms. Then do what you can to avoid or limit contact with these things.

- If animal dander is a problem for you, keep your pet out of the house or at least out of your bedroom, or find it a new home.
- Do not smoke or allow smoking in your home.
- If pollen is a problem for you, stay indoors with the air conditioner on, if possible, when the pollen count is high.
- To control dust mites, wash your sheets, blankets, pillows, and stuffed toys once a week in hot water. You can get special dust proof covers for your mattress and pillows.
- If cold air bothers you, wear a scarf over your mouth and nose in the winter.
- If you have symptoms when you exercise or do routine physical activities like climbing stairs, work with your doctor to find ways to be active without having asthma symptoms. Physical activity is important.
- If you are allergic to sulfites, avoid foods (like dried fruit) or beverages (like wine) that contain them.

Be alert for warning signs of an asthma attack.

- Watch for symptoms (for example, coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, and difficulty breathing) and use your quick-relief medicine as directed by your doctor.
- Use your peak flow meter as directed to monitor your asthma.

If your asthma is not under control, there will be signs that you should not ignore. The following are some signs that your asthma is getting worse:

- You have asthma symptoms more often than usual.
- Your asthma symptoms are worse than they used to be.
- Your asthma symptoms are bothering you a lot at night and making you lose sleep.
- You are missing school or work because of your asthma.
- Your peak flow number is low or varies a lot from day to day.
- Your asthma medicines do not seem to be working very well anymore.
- You have to use your short-acting quick-relief, or "rescue," inhaler more often. (Using quick-relief medicine every day or using more than one inhaler a month is too much.)
- You have to go to the emergency room or doctor because of an asthma attack. You end up in the hospital because of your asthma.

If your asthma seems to be getting worse, see your doctor. You may need to change your medicines or do other things to get your asthma under control.

Helping Your Child Live With Asthma

Children with asthma need the help of parents, other caregivers, teachers, and health care professionals to keep their asthma under control.

You can help your child with asthma keep it under control. For example, you can:

- Take your child to the doctor for regular checkups and treatment.
- Make sure your child has an asthma self-management plan and that you know how to follow it.
- Help your child learn about asthma and how to control it.
- Help your child learn what things cause his or her asthma symptoms and how to avoid them, if possible.
- Protect your child from tobacco smoke by not smoking and not allowing people to smoke in your home.
- Find ways to reduce your child's exposure to allergens that bring on asthma attacks, like pollen, dust mites, cockroaches, or animal dander.
- Make sure your child knows how to take asthma medicines correctly (if your child is old enough to use an inhaler without your help).
- Make sure that your child uses a peak flow meter to help monitor and control asthma.
- Encourage your child to take part in physical activity. Work together to keep his or her asthma under control. Your child can be active.
- Talk to your child's other caregivers, teachers, or coaches about his or her asthma; give them copies of your child's asthma self-management plan.

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